



# City of Somerville Job Creation & Retention Trust Monthly Meeting

Vickie Choitz, Managing Trustee  
Anika Van Eaton, Co-Manager  
*Trustees*  
Thomas Bent  
Lisa Cook  
Silvana Dinka  
Thomas F. Galligani, Jr.  
Colleen Moran  
JT Scott  
Rand Wilson

## Meeting Minutes

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**Location:** Online via GoToWebinar Platform

**Date:** January 11, 2022

**Time:** 6:04 PM

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### Attendance

- Trustees: Thomas Bent, Vickie Choitz, Silvana Dinka, Colleen Moran, JT Scott, Anika Van Eaton
- Lisa Cook, Tom Galligani and Rand Wilson joined shortly after attendance roll call but stayed for duration of meeting.
- Economic Development Staff: Jennifer Mancina, William Blackmer

### Meeting Minutes

- V Choitz: Meeting called to order at 6:04pm. Quorum established.
- W Blackmer: House rules about technology delivered.

V Choitz: We are going to insert new agenda item—Welcome and Introductions for JT Scott who will be the new representative on the JCRT from the City Council

### 1. Review and Approval of December 14 Meeting Minutes

- V Choitz: One question I had in the minutes was regarding the meaning of “V Choitz recognized T Galligani has approved to meeting”?
- W Blackmer: Let me investigate this, and we can strike it from the minutes if it is not needed.
- V Choitz: I don’t have another edit but wanted to flag next step of J Mancina coordinating with L Cook, T Bent, and new CTE Director to formalize talent pipeline into City jobs via experiential learning. Do we have any updates on this?
  - L Cook: Working through process of launching partnership. SCALE will have lab access, but we are trying to navigate hiring process and collective bargaining process of having fulltime vocational ed instructors also teaching in an evening setting. There are pay differentials between adult ed and K-12 sectors. We are working on navigating compensation via contracts, and I don’t think we anticipated this hurdle. We are open to input on how best to offer this programming utilizing the talent of the existing vocational ed staff.
  - T Bent: The decision was made not to go after the Commonwealth Grant, but is there another grant that you will apply for?
  - L Cook: I have had conversations with school leadership as we come to the end of a 4-year DESE funding cycle about what the future of SCALE should look like. I’m advocating for an IET model that integrates academics with training instead of a model of academics *THEN* training. We want to gather public input on what residents want to see in a continuing ed division in Somerville and how to connect this with resources available at the high school.
  - V Choitz: This sounds very promising. If there are updates next time, we can consider adding this on as an official agenda item in the next meeting.

- T Bent: Back to the 12/14 Minutes, I had asked questions about the attendees at the public meeting and about Just A Start students who had not been placed in jobs yet.
- W Blackmer: I think these were both included in an email sent to the Board, but I will track down this email and send it to you, Tom.
- Motion: A Van Eaton makes motion to approve 12/14 meeting minutes. T Bent seconds.
- Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 8-0 approving 12/14 meeting minutes.

## 2. Previously Approved Priorities for Investments

- W Blackmer: This January memo once again shows 2021 ranked investment priorities as well as the Board's allocations to each priority to date. Some ranked priorities have been funded, for example #2 Childcare, and #3 Wage Theft and Worker's Rights. A couple of the top priorities are also partially funded that are just waiting on grantees to finish their current year. After priority 4, many are in the exploratory phase and we will provide updates on some of these items later in the meeting. We wanted to remind the Board of our priority list as we continue to vote on investments.
- V Choitz: Thank you. This is laid out clearly.

## 3. Previously Approved Investments

- A) COVID-19 Student Emergency Fund

W Blackmer: In addition to the 2021 investment priorities, there were also investment priorities for 2020, and we wanted to circle back regarding the COVID-19 student emergency fund.

- On March 26, 2020, the JCRT voted to establish a \$100,000 COVID-19 fund to support community organizations serving Somerville residents. Applications were reviewed by City Staff and a subcommittee of JCRT Board Members, resulting in the distribution of \$77,746 to the following organizations: Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS), Elizabeth Peabody House, Somerville Community Corporation (SCC), Somerville Homeless Coalition, the Welcome Project, Union Square Main Streets, Somerville Public Schools, and SCALE.
- On September 15, 2020, the JCRT unanimously voted to reallocate the remaining \$22,254 of the COVID-19 Emergency fund to the student emergency fund. This fund's purpose being to assist Somerville residents enrolled in JCRT-funded training programs in the case of emergency expenses.
- At the November 10, 2020, City shared that it was in the contracting purpose with CAAS to manage these funds.
- Unfortunately, after retracing our steps, we discovered this contract was not fully executed as a result of the pandemic and the staffing vacancy. We now have this balance and I've brought this information to the Board to decide how this money should be spent.
- The discussion and vote will be on \$22,254, a slight revision from the amount stated on the agenda.
- V Choitz: Thank you for this overview. We were wondering why grantees had not been requesting these funds given the continued effects of the pandemic, so this account explains this. If the Board wants to keep this money in the fund, we also want to identify an organization who could administer the fund. Originally it was going to be CAAS, but it is my understanding that there has been some turnover and we have some concerns about their capacity to do so. W Blackmer and J Mancia, did you want to talk about who may be able to administer this funding?
  - J Mancia: As you suspected Vickie, it is a bit of a tough ask since the administrative costs are so small. I did research and call one community organization and they are thinking through this opportunity still. We discussed with T Galligani and we do need to follow procurement

- procedures. We also saw that in the past in addition to communication with CAAS, the fund did go through the transparent process involving City of Somerville's purchasing department. For the sake of transparency, I think we should put it out through these channels once again. SCC is who we reached out to, but they haven't confirmed that they'd want to administer this fund.
- V Choitz: When you mention "normal channels", do you mean through a competitive process for administering this funding?
  - J Mancia: Yes.
  - V Choitz: Does anyone have question or thoughts on use of these funds?
    - T Bent: How long would a competitive process take?
    - J Mancia: A few weeks. Probably up to 4.
    - T Bent: If we can use this money as intended quickly, then this makes sense to me. If it would be a long process, then I'd recommend putting the money back into the general JCRT pot.
    - A Van Eaton: We should pursue original use. Emergency needs will likely continue for training participants due to COVID and they existed before the pandemic. I'm a bit concerned about putting out an RFP since we may not get interest because the cost for a nonprofit to administer this is so low. Are there other ways we could get this money in the hands of training providers sooner, like if we could proportion out the money to each provider for emergency costs for participants and they'd report back on use? If we get indication that someone would apply for the RFP, then I am fine with that process, but I don't want the RFP process to delay the money getting to those who need it.
    - V Choitz: I agree with T Bent and A Van Eaton. Now that we have more staff support to the JCRT, would J Mancia or W Blackmer be able to administer these funds?
    - T Galligani: These are interesting ideas. It seems efficient to build this into the existing contracts we have. There is a chance that our Econ Development staff could do this, however there is a lot of individual processing that would need to happen for each application.
    - V Choitz: We could probably issue a contract amendment.
    - C Moran: I think the need is evident, so I don't think we even need to ask providers about whether participants have a need.
    - R Wilson: How is this different than the money awarded to Somerville schools for computer purchases.
    - T Galligani: This was an easier process since we were working with the school. Our economic development team will make a plan.
    - W Blackmer: I wanted to clarify about fund use, are we including both education and training grantees?
    - V Choitz: Absolutely, also to those in worker rights trainings.
    - W Blackmer: Does this include non-Somerville residents?
    - V Choitz: I would think we would want it to be for Somerville residents in accordance with the mission of the Trust.
    - V Choitz: It sounds like we need to delay the vote and the City staff will come up with a plan to review at the next meeting to vote on. It sounds like modifying current contracts and budgets to proportionally for each grantee would be a favorable and efficient approach.
    - T Bent: With new RFPs, we should put some sort of clause about emergency funding being available.
    - L Cook: COVID is really disrupting the SCALE program; teachers, students in isolation, impacted attendance, etc. We have support from SPS to get rapid tests, but I am sure this is a huge barrier for other job training programs and classes. This is one idea on how emergency funds could be used.

- A Van Eaton: Would our providers benefit from COVID supplies? This is something to consider.
- T Bent: Does the City or State have a bulk purchasing option for testing supplies?
- T Galligani: The City is working on a large batch. We are a small piece of the overall City discussion as to where this distribution goes.
- V Choitz: I want to vote tonight after hearing L Cook's testimonial
- A Van Eaton: We can still vote to allocate the funds. We are trying to decide how this money should be spent, so we should vote on this authorization of funds.
- MOTION: V Choitz makes motion to use remaining \$22,254 in our COVID emergency fund for the student emergency fund. Staff will come up with a plan for administering this fund. A Van Eaton seconds the motion.
- ROLL CALL VOTE: Motion passes unanimously to use remaining \$22,254 in our COVID emergency fund for the student emergency fund.

#### B) Childcare Subcommittee Update

- A Van Eaton: On January 3, 2022 the following members of the subcommittee met with City Staff, Jennifer and William, to begin drafting the RFP: S Dinka, R Wilson, and A Van Eaton. We moved quickly on this draft and revisions have been sent back. The next step is to finalize the RFP so that we can release it to interested parties. The JCRT received the draft earlier today. Should we walk through it together or have individuals look at it on their own time and submitting comments in the next few days.
- V Choitz: Let's review offline independently
- C Moran: I'm happy with an aggressive deadline. Is there any specific sections to focus on with edits?
- A Van Eaton: We followed templates that have previously been used but wanted to make it a straightforward application process. The Board should focus on the scope of work section and also the required proposal contents.
- V Choitz: When would deadline be for feedback?
- W Blackmer: A week from this Friday, so by Friday January 21<sup>st</sup>
- A Van Eaton: If we get feedback that requires a full Board conversation, we can discuss again at February meeting, but if there are smaller edits proposed, then I would suggest we don't bring it back to the full Board at another meeting.
- V Choitz: I agree with A Van Eaton.

#### 4. Municipal Apprenticeship Update

- JT Scott: I am very excited about this concept. We can move quickly to prop up a framework that can then be scaled with ARPA money addressing massive infrastructure and climate change concerns while promoting employment opportunities for immigrant and low-income individuals. There's a lack of capacity across many City departments, including DPW, Water and Sewer, Buildings and Grounds. If you can pass on a recording of the rest of this meeting, I would appreciate it as I do need to head to another meeting.
- A Van Eaton: We highlighted funding a feasibility study related to municipal apprenticeships as a funding priority in 2021, and in December had a productive conversation trying to identify the needs, and opportunities for internal collaboration within the City. Since then, we reached out to the community members who submitted the proposal. We plan to invite them to our next meeting to learn more about their plan. In the meantime, Co-chairs and City staff will meet with the proposers to prepare for an action-oriented conversation at the February meeting.

- V Choitz: The question remains, as R Wilson asked last time. What exactly is the apprenticeship trying to solve for. There is also discussion about whether an apprenticeship is the best vehicle for achieving the goal. We want to discuss this with the community members.
- T Bent: Are we including someone from DPW to find out their exact needs? Do they already have training programs that employees could access? Additionally, to consider is how SCALE and CTE are involved in this puzzle.
- J Mancina: I had been in touch with HR and can circle back with them about their current hiring needs.
- L Cook: I love the apprenticeship model. As we look at SCALE, we receive funding from the Department of Labor, but it sits in the Department of Ed. There is a mismatch when adult education is thought of as strictly all academic without the employer engagement components. We are losing students because they have to often work 2-3 jobs, but if we can get them 1 really great job in the City where there is a need, I love the idea of exploring this.
- R Wilson: Initiative is coming from head of municipal employees union who works in DPW. He is frustrated with the vacancies and the amount of positions they are having to contract out. We need a model that utilizes City talent for these City jobs, whether or not it is an “apprenticeship.”
- T Bent: Hopefully there is mutual agreement on how to help both new City employees and existing resident employees who do want to advance internally.
- R Wilson: There are many vacancies across many union departments (nurses, librarians, postal workers, etc.). Many employees don’t live in Somerville. We want to encourage City employees to also be residents.
- V Choitz: J Mancina, we want to get specific data from HR: list of vacant positions, and within that list, which could be filled by existing employees via internal training and promotion. Third, regarding “contracting out”, a list to see how many positions, or what proportion are currently being contracted out.
- R Wilson: JT Scott is a good resource for this data. There is a bit of tension around the issue of “contracting out” issue, so we should be sensitive to this.
- T Galligani: We need to keep in mind that the aim of this money is to provide resources for Somerville residents. We need to make sure that this fund isn’t seen as a general professional development fund for all Somerville employees. Is this professional development—is this an apprenticeship? These are questions to be aware of.
- V Choitz: We need to also keep in mind that these funds are intended to help individuals who are lower wage earners or are lower skilled. Do we know if there is a Labor Management Joint Training Fund that union members can access?
- T Bent: T Galligani makes a good point.
- V Choitz: We will anticipate this being on our next agenda and having the advocates at our next meeting to continue exploring this.

## 5. Job Training Scholarship Update

- V Choitz: As background, this idea was brought to us in May about a fund to support individuals in specific job training programs. In May, we had voted for the City Staff to come up with a plan or a concept for this scholarship.
- J Mancina: Vickie, we discussed a potential draft in February, but after reading and better understanding the student emergency fund, I want to propose that we follow through on that funding and learn through that process and then use that information to inform the scholarship fund.
- V Choitz: I’m wondering how much data we will be able to get if we push the student emergency fund into the hands of providers about how the funds are spent. I would be interested in moving forward with the potential plan for a job training scholarship pilot.
- T Bent: A more complete plan would be helpful to see.

- V Choitz: J Mancina and I will work together on drafting this plan before the next meeting.

#### 6. Invitation to Appear on Somerville Labor Show

- A Van Eaton: Ed Halloran hosts this show through the Somerville Media Center. This a good opportunity to share with the public about the JCRT investments, priorities, and work of the Trust. Is anyone interested in this opportunity.
- R Wilson: I'd be happy to participate, but I'm a regular on the Somerville Labor Show.
- A Van Eaton: I'd be happy to participate.
- T Bent: I can participate too.
- W Blackmer: You can loop me into preparations as well.

#### 7. Additional Items not anticipated by the Chair

- None

#### 8. Scheduling next meeting

- W Blackmer: JT has at least one other committee meeting on Tuesdays, so additional follow up is needed to identify a permanent time, but I think we should hold the same time next month.

#### 9. Meeting Adjournment

- Motion: R Wilson makes motion to adjourn. T Bent seconded.
- Roll Call Vote: Motion passes 8-0 to adjourn at 7:28PM.  
JT Scott had to leave meeting before motion to adjourn.

#### Meeting Documents

- Draft Job Creation & Retention Trust Meeting Minutes 12.14.21
- January 2022 JCRT Memo

Meeting minutes approved on 2/8/2022.